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ABSTRACT. We evaluated the effect of long-term passive smoking (involuntary inhalation of tobacco smoke by nonsmokers) and long-term voluntary smoking on specific indexes of pulmonary function in 2100 middle-aged subjects. Regardless of sex, nonsmokers chronically exposed to tobacco smoke had a lower forced mid-expiratory flow rate (FEF 25 to 75 per cent) and forced end-expiratory flow rate (FEF 75 to 85 per cent) than nonsmokers not exposed ($P<0.005$). In addition, values in passive smokers were not significantly different from those in light smokers and smokers who did not inhale ($P<0.005$). When we looked at the extent to which smoke exposure is related to graded abnormality, we found that nonsmokers in smoke-free working environments have the highest scores on spirometric tests; passive smokers, smokers who do not inhale, and light smokers score similarly and significantly lower; and heavy smokers score the lowest ($P<0.005$). We conclude that chronic exposure to tobacco smoke in the work environment is deleterious to the nonsmoker and significantly reduces small-airways function.

2023386364

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